

The Importance Of Carpet Weaving In The Development Of Tourism Today

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Abstract: This article explores the history, techniques, and contemporary significance of carpet weaving, which has developed in the territory of Karakalpakstan since ancient times. Based on archaeological findings and ethnographic studies, it is shown that carpet weaving originated as early as the Paleolithic era and evolved as a means of cultural exchange between various ethnic groups. Special attention is given to the evolution of weaving techniques—symmetric and asymmetric knots—as well as the common features of carpet weaving shared with neighboring peoples. The article also analyzes government measures to support handicrafts adopted in Uzbekistan and highlights the potential for involving the population in tourism through the development of carpet weaving. Carpet weaving is presented not only as part of historical and cultural heritage but also as an important resource for the development of the modern tourism industry.

Keywords: Carpet weaving, ethno-tourism, Karakalpakstan, handicrafts, cultural heritage, symmetrical knot, tourism potential.

Introduction: Carpet weaving is a form of traditional national craftsmanship that originated in ancient times. Since our people have historically led a nomadic, livestock-breeding lifestyle, they produced small carpets made of felt or woolen threads, which were used as bedding and were convenient to carry during migrations. These provided comfort to the nomadic population. Carpets, which initially emerged out of necessity, later became part of everyday life and formed the basis for trade relations. It is also worth noting that numerous artifacts confirming the existence of textile traditions have been discovered during archaeological and ethnographic expeditions in the territory of Karakalpakstan. This can be illustrated by the following historical facts.

Archaeological expeditions have shown that in the territory of Karakalpakstan—specifically along the banks of the Amu Darya River, in the Aral Sea region, and on the Ustyurt Plateau—agriculture, livestock breeding, and fishing were practiced from ancient times and played a major role in the economic life of the population. Archaeological finds discovered in ancient settlements located in these areas serve as

evidence of these claims. Ancient history, divided into several periods, begins with the Paleolithic (Stone Age), which occurred in different regions of the world at various times and under different circumstances. For example, in the Ustyurt region of Karakalpakstan, people settled during the Mousterian era, and later during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. Subsequently, nomadic Saka tribes also inhabited the Ustyurt Plateau. Stone Age monuments discovered and studied in the Ustyurt region indicate that people did not live there permanently, but rather temporarily occupied the area and hunted depending on the season. During this period, there were numerous lakes and springs with a high level of fresh groundwater suitable for drinking. Despite these favorable conditions, no evidence of permanent settlements has been found, and signs of developed economic activity are rare. The Ustyurt steppe served only as a temporary refuge, as confirmed by numerous literary sources. In the territory of Karakalpakstan, sites from the Mousterian period include Esen-1, Esen-2, and Karakudyk, located northwest of the Barsakelmes ridge on the Ustyurt Plateau. While the Esen sites are associated with the processing of stone tools,

Karakudyk was used as a seasonal hunting camp [1, p. 8]. It is also worth noting that although no permanent settlements related to economic life have been found in Karakalpakstan, during the Neolithic period (4th–6th millennia BCE)—when livestock breeding and agriculture became the dominant activities—a rich culture began to take shape. In the delta of the Akchadarya River lived tribes belonging to the Kelteminar culture. Among their settlements, the site of Jabash is particularly notable. It was here, in Karakalpakstan, that the first signs of a complex economy emerged.

An analysis of tools and faunal remains allowed researchers to identify the Kelteminar people as hunters and fishermen. V.I. Gromov states that wild animals were predominantly found in the region, including boars, deer, turtles, and birds [2, p. 60]. In the Bronze Age (3rd–2nd millennia BCE), hunting and fishing were gradually replaced by agriculture and animal husbandry. According to S.P. Tolstov, the population of the Tazabagyab culture engaged in farming, as evidenced by cereal remains found in dwellings. Bone material from bulls, sheep, and horses was also discovered [3, p. 52]. At the same time, signs of irrigated agriculture began to appear. The development of agriculture, irrigation technologies, and copper and bronze metallurgy led to cultural changes in the Southern Aral Sea region. The cultivation of industrial crops, in turn, contributed to the growth of textile production. This is supported by archaeological finds such as needles and pins with round eyes at the Dzhekaparsan-2 settlement [3, p. 71]. Animal husbandry played a crucial role in the emergence of textile craftsmanship. As a result of archaeological excavations conducted in 1937–1938 at the settlements of Burkit-kala, Uy-kala, Toprak-kala, and Janbas-kala, researchers discovered leather footwear and a piece of fine white felt covered with multicolored wool fabric decorated with spiral patterns. Although these findings relate more broadly to textile production, they can be regarded as early precursors of carpet weaving [4, p. 176]. The development of textiles facilitated contact with other peoples, which in turn influenced the evolution of carpet weaving as an art form. One clear piece of evidence for this is the discovery of a pile carpet in the territory of Karakalpakstan. For instance, fragments of a woolen pile carpet were found in a room adjacent to the memorial hall at Baraktam-1—dating to the 4th–5th centuries—during excavations led by E.E. Nezarik's team. The carpet was dyed in blue, red, and golden colors using plant-based dyes [3, p. 241]. Although carpets have been found in the territory of Karakalpakstan starting from the medieval period, this

does not mean that carpet weaving originated in that era. The scholar A. Otemisov writes: "In the 19th and early 20th centuries, weaving had spread to all Karakalpak villages" [5, p. 80]. This indicates the existence of close trade and cultural ties between peoples, which undoubtedly influenced carpet weaving techniques as well. The technique of carpet weaving depends on the material used to make the carpet and on methods characteristic of a particular region. One of the oldest methods is weaving using loops. In its archaic form, a looped thread is inserted into the weft base and brought to the surface of the fabric [6, p. 32]. In other cases, the pile is created on the base using knots placed horizontally between rows of warp threads. The pile thread is wrapped once or one and a half times around the warp threads and then cut [7]. This method is known as knotted weaving and is classified into symmetric and asymmetric types [8]. The symmetric method is also known as the Turkish knot or Ghiordes (named after a city in western Turkey), and in some sources, it is referred to as duochitma (double-layered knot) [9, p. 183]. The asymmetric knot also has different names depending on the region. According to E. Tsareva, the symmetric knot was used by Turkmen tribes, in particular the Yomuts, Imuds, and Igdys. This knot was also used by weavers in Asia Minor, the Caucasus, and, of course, the Karakalpaks—northern neighbors of the Turkmens [10, p. 21]. The use of similar carpet weaving techniques by both Turkmens and Karakalpaks can be explained, in part, by their cohabitation in the same region.

Hypothesis 1: Historical data indicate that the southern shore of the Aral Sea—likely the ancient delta of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers—was a central hub of connections between ethnic groups. While the Yomuts left this area during the time of the Oghuz, the Karakalpaks, on the contrary, have lived here since the 1st millennium BCE and can be considered indigenous inhabitants of the Aral Sea region. After some Turkmens departed with the Oghuz, the Karakalpaks possibly continued to develop carpet weaving based on earlier traditions [10, p. 25]. This is confirmed by a pile carpet made using the "duochitma" technique, found at the Baraktam-1 settlement in the Takhtakupyr district [3, p. 72].

Hypothesis 2 suggests the preservation of the same weaving technique by both peoples throughout their existence under various dynasties that ruled Central Asia. Since the invasion of the Achaemenid dynasty (6th century BCE), a large territory of Khwarezm—including the lands of modern Karakalpakstan and Turkmenistan—came under their control [11, p. 196]. Although the influence of the Achaemenids on the production of pile carpets is not confirmed, the earliest

examples of such carpets date back to this period [12, p. 402]. In the 4th century BCE, the lands of Khwarezm passed to the realm of Alexander the Great, and later to the Bactrian and Kushan kingdoms [13, p. 76]. Scholars believe that Bactria was one of the main carpet centers of the ancient world. E. Gül writes: "Bactria was one of the largest centers of carpet weaving, especially known for its embroidered and pile (including knotted) carpets with rich ornamentation" [14, p. 21]. Bactrian carpets were distinguished by the use of various knots, predominantly of the asymmetric type with an open left side. Some examples were made exclusively using the symmetric technique [15, p. 78]. This suggests that the technique shared by the Karakalpaks and Turkmens may have been borrowed from the Bactrians. Thus, although the aforementioned information pertains to the history of carpet weaving or the origin of its techniques, it reflects connections between different peoples. Therefore, carpet making cannot be considered the heritage of a single ethnic group. Crafts that demonstrate these ethnic ties directly create broad opportunities for tourism development. This is because most tourists explore many cultures through comparative study and discover new histories. As a result, a number of decrees and laws have been adopted in our country aimed at promoting our handicrafts in cooperation with neighboring countries. The adoption of the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. UP-5242 dated November 17, 2017, "On measures for the further development of handicrafts and comprehensive support of craftsmen" has created new opportunities in the sector [16]. By decree, citizens and families engaged in handicraft activities receive comprehensive support, especially for craftsmen starting their work. This includes the improvement and increased efficiency of "Ustashogird" schools and, on this basis, the creation of new jobs; assistance to handicraft entities with state registration, allocation of land plots and buildings, connection to engineering networks, and ensuring an uninterrupted supply of equipment, tools, raw materials, and supplies; provision of preferential loans. In cities and districts where folk crafts and creative traditions are widely developed, centers for craft development are being established, unique types of handicrafts are being restored and further developed, and market infrastructure is being formed to deliver handicraft products to consumers. The decree also promotes the export of handicraft products and the introduction of national crafts to foreign countries. It outlines measures to support the presentation of national craft products at exhibitions and fairs [16]. Additionally, for the further development of tourism, the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. UP-91 dated June 12, 2023, "On measures to

involve the population in handicrafts and create favorable conditions for the development of handicraft activities," was adopted. The purpose of this decree, stated in the introduction, is to create favorable conditions for the development of handicrafts in our country, in particular, improving the taxation system for craftsmen, ensuring uninterrupted supply of necessary raw materials and financial resources, creating infrastructure, expanding markets for handicraft products, and broadly involving the population in handicrafts. Clause 11 of the document approves a list of exhibitions, festivals, and international conferences on various handicraft sectors to be held in 2023–2024, according to Appendix No. 3. According to this, at least two events are planned in each region. Notably, in August 2023, an exhibition of carpet weaving titled "History Written on Carpets" was held in the city of Khiva, Khorezm region [17].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, history is not only about knowing oneself and one's people; it should be viewed as a tool that promotes unity, friendship, and peace among nations. Ethnotourism plays an important role in strengthening such historical ties. At the foundation of ethnotourism lies handicrafts.

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